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ABSTRACT

Fully addressing most problems clients bring to therapy usually requires more than one session. Some student therapists seem to be more capable than others of engaging clients and promoting more visits when warranted. To discover whether graduate admissions information can predict a psychologist-trainee's ability to readily engage clients, data were collected over a 6-year period from 43 clinical psychology practicum students. The data included: (1) an engagement quotient (EQ) which is the percentage of clients returning to the trainee for more than one session; (2) age; (3) Graduate Record Examination Verbal score (GREV); (4) Graduate Record Examination Quantitative score (GREQ); (5) Miller Analogies Test score (MAT); (6) grades from two clinical diagnosis courses; and (7) a new variable created by subtracting the GREQ score from the GREV score (GREV-GREQ). The results showed that all variables correlated significantly with EQ. Age had the most predictive value followed by GREV scores, GREV-GREQ, and MAT scores. These findings suggest that higher engaging trainees, relative to lower engagers, have better verbal and diagnostic skills and also tend to be older. It appears, from these results, that high engagers can be identified at admission to graduate school and from certain course grades. (DPO)

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Factors Associated with Practicum Students' Engagement of Clients in Counseling

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Paper presented at the Eastern Psychological Association
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In order for therapy to take place, both therapist and client must be engaged sufficiently in the process to attend therapy sessions. Mere session attendance in no way guarantees that therapy will be effective, but effective therapy cannot take place without such attendance. White and Pollard (1982) found a relationship between therapists' competence and clients' session attendance. Clients of trainee therapists who received more favorable supervisory ratings had better session attendance records than did clients of trainees with less favorable supervisory ratings.

It is unrealistic to expect therapists to engage for more than one session all clients they see. Some problems do not call for long-term therapy (Gelso & Johnson, 1983), and some clients feel helped by one session even though their therapists may feel they need further help (Silverman & Beech, 1979). However, most problems clients bring to therapy take more than one session to address.

In training clinical psychology practicum students, we have noticed that some trainees readily engage clients and others seem to be less capable engagers. To quantify trainee engagement of clients, an engagement quotient (EQ), which is the percentage of clients returning to the trainee for more than one session, was devised. This study was done to determine the relationship among EQ and academic and admissions information. Perhaps potentially good engagers can be identified before graduate school admission

or from their graduate classroom achievements.

Subjects

Participants were 43 clinical psychology practicum students who had completed virtually all of their clinical coursework. The year-long practicum represented their first "hands-on" counseling and psychotherapy experience.

Procedure

During the course of an academic year, each practicum student spent two days a week in the counseling center. At the center where the study was done, the intake interview is conducted by the trainee who handles all subsequent counseling or therapy for that client. The center offers vocational, educational, and personal counseling, and all trainees provide all types of service. Interviews are assigned by matching client and trainee schedules.

Over a six-year period, the following data were collected on all practicum student trainees in the center: EQ, age, Graduate Record Examination Verbal (GREV) score, Graduate Record Examination Quantitative (GREQ) score, and Millers Analogies Test (MAT). The following graduate course grades were also collected: clinical diagnosis and advanced clinical diagnosis. An eighth variable was created by subtracting the GRE quantitative score from the GRE Verbal score.

Results

The means, standard deviations, and sample sizes for all variables and the correlations of the six predictor variables with EQ are presented in Table 1. Notice that all six predictor variables correlate significantly with EQ. Age was the most predictive single factor, $r(33) = .50$, accounting for 25% of the variance in EQ.

Predictability of EQ can be increased by using information commonly available before the student is admitted to a graduate program. The first variable is age. The second variable is the verbal score obtained on the Graduate Record Exam (GREV). The third variable is the difference between the verbal and quantitative GRE scores (GREV - GREQ). The fourth variable is the score on the MAT. A multiple regression analysis predicting EQ from these four variables yielded $\underline{R}(25) = .67$, $\underline{p}<.01$ which accounts for 45% of the variance in EQ. The predictor equation associated with this analysis is presented as Equation (1). EQ is predicted as a percent of clients engaged.

(1) EQ=0.6482 (Age) + 0.0850 (GREV) + 0.0047 (GREV-GREQ) -
0.3991 (MAT) - 2.9322

Predictability of EQ can be further increased by incorporating the student's grades in two important clinical courses along with the prior variables. These courses are Clinical Diagnosis (CLDI) and Advanced Clinical Diagnosis (ADCLDI). A multiple regression analysis predicting EQ from these six variables yielded $\underline{R}(19) = .71$, $\underline{p}<.05$ which accounts for 50% of the variance in EQ. The predictor equation associated with this analysis is presented as Equation (2). Again, EQ is predicted as a percent of clients engaged.

(2) EQ = 0.7852 (Age) + 0.0624 (GREV) + 0.0088 (GREV-GREQ) -
0.2639 (MAT) - 0.3937 (CLDI) + 4.8994 (ADCLDI) - 19.3918

Implications and Conclusions

The main conclusion is that the ability of graduate students to engage clients during a third-year clinical practicum is directly proportional to a) their age, b) their verbal skills as measured by the GRE and MAT, and c) their performance in the clinical diagnosis course sequence. The GREV-GREQ derived variable emphasizes the importance of having higher verbal than

quantitative aptitude.

The implication of the age finding is that older students are more mature due partly to more life experiences and that this augmented experiential basis allows them to engage clients more effectively. The implication of the verbal skills findings is that they reflect greater verbal comprehension implying that such people are more able to extract meaning from the clients words and restate this meaning in their own words. Hence, the client feels she/he is being truly understood, perhaps for the first time, and therefore returns for additional sessions.

The implication of the clinical diagnosis finding is that students who are more able to recognize the presence of pathology and formulate diagnostic questions and conclusions are better able to define problems and communicate the need for additional sessions to the client. Performance in the clinical diagnosis sequence is probably facilitated by being older and by having greater verbal skills including verbal comprehension.

In summary, the study found that higher engaging trainees, relative to lower engagers, have better verbal and diagnostic skills and also tend to be older. The results indicate that high engagers can be identified at admission to graduate school and from certain course grades.

References

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Silverman, W. H., & Beech, R. P. (1979). Are drop-outs, drop-outs? Journal of Community Psychology, 7, 236-242.

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Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Sample Sizes for Predictor Variables and Their Correlation with the Engagement Quotient (EQ)

Variable	Mean	SD	N	Correlation with EQ
Age	28.63	5.63	35	.50**
GREV	679.30	97.21	43	.48**
GREV-GREQ	37.67	115.76	43	.33*
MAT	76.32	12.60	43	.32*
Clinical Dx	3.65	0.47	42	.43**
Advanced Clinical Dx	3.77	0.37	33	.39*
EQ	42.70	10.44	43	

*$p<.05$. **$p<.01$.